
Reuven Amitai. *Holy War and Rapprochement. Studies in the Relations between the Mamluk Sultanate and the Mongol Ilkhanate (1260-1335)*

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Reuven Amitai. *Holy War and Rapprochement. Studies in the Relations between the Mamluk Sultanate and the Mongol Ilkhanate (1260-1335)*. Turnhout, Brepols, 2013, 400 p. (Miroir de l'Orient Musulman, Book 4)

- 1 Nearly two decades after the publication of his seminal work *Mongols and Mamluks. The Mamluk-Īlkhānīd War, 1260-1281*, Prof. Reuven Amitai presents an updated and extended study of the sixty years' war that opposed the Ilkhanids and the Mamluk sultanate in the 13th and 14th centuries. The monograph is a compilation of four lectures Prof. Amitai gave at the École Pratique des Hautes Études (EPHE) in Paris in 2007 (organized by Prof. Denise Aigle) on the military, ideological, religious and social aspects of the conflict. Though the work as such is mostly based on Prof. Amitai's previous research, it also incorporates more recent historiography and debates that has emerged in the field, which Amitai addresses and reviews, adding at times some new points of discussion.
- 2 The first chapter "The Dynamics of Conflict: Mongol Aggression, Mamluk Countermeasures" looks back at the military background of the sixty years' war between the Mongol Ilkhanate (r. 1260-1335) and the Mamluk sultanate (r. 1250-1517) from the first confrontation at Ayn Jālūt in 1260 until the peace agreement in 1320.

More than a study of the battles, the chapter discusses the “tactics and strategies” developed and used by both sides. Whereas the Mongols clearly were the instigators of most of the conflicts, the Mamluks were far from outdone. Prof. Amitai correctly shows that from early on the sultanate developed coherent policies aiming at the development of the army and of a “secret war” at the frontier. The latter point is further developed through the analysis of the raiding policy (or “active defense”) initiated by the Mamluks at the borders of Mongol territory. Particularly interesting is also the combination of this policy with the development of networks of intelligence operators (*quṣṣād*), who not only gathered information, but also spread disinformation. To assess the success of Mamluk strategies, Prof. Amitai turns to two debates: that on the nature of the soldiers of each army (Mamluk professionals vs. Mongol amateurs), and that on logistics (Syria’s limitation for Mongol troops). Doing so, he discusses and reviews the scholarship by J. M. Smith Jr. and David Morgan, which according to him have overestimated the logistical factors (p. 30).

- 3 In the second and third chapters, Prof. Amitai focuses on the ideological-religious aspect of the conflict, respectively before and after the Ilkhanids’ conversion to Islam at the end of the 13th century. In chapter two, “Holy War: Mamluk Jihad versus Mongol Mandate from Heaven”, Amitai attempts to link Mongol imperial ideology with the concept of Holy war. He argues for the need to look into the religious aspect of Mongol ideology, which was a “well-articulated ideology based on a Heaven-given mission to bring peace to the world” (p. 43). Following Smith, Amitai tracks back this ideology at an early date (1220), and analyses further the evolution of this doctrine through the careful reading of Ilkhanids’ correspondences sent to the Mamluks. In the last part of the chapter, Amitai turns to Mamluks’ set of ideologies based on the concept of “defenders of Islam” (under the cover of *jihād*) and deeply linked to the establishment of the caliphate in Cairo. Whereas Amitai follows previous research in the field, he also sets himself apart by highlighting that Mamluk ideology was first and foremost developed for an internal audience, and not directed to the Mongols.
- 4 Chapter three, “The Conversion of the Mongols to Islam, the Ongoing Ideological Struggle and the Coming of Peace” further discusses the ideological and religious aspect of Mamluk-Ilkhanid conflict. It analyzes the evolution of Ilkhanid ideology after the Mongols converted to Islam. Prof. Amitai first tackles the Islamization of the Mongols before their official conversion in the late 13th century, and shows how this was a bottom-up process, which greatly changed the Mongols’ attitude towards their subjects. Mongol conversion however, did not mark the end of the Mongol tradition of Mandate of Heaven, but rather, both ideologies were combined. Furthermore, it did not end the conflict with the Mamluks, since Tegüder and Ghazan were in fact even more aggressive towards their co-religionists. Instead, the conflict was now also given an Islamic justification, which were made obvious through their new titles, their changing attitudes towards the *dhimmīs*, their patronage, but also through their critics of Mamluk morality and criminal acts (vs. Ghazan piety and legitimacy). The Mamluk response to Ilkhanid conversion is then presented based on previously studied materials, such as diplomatic correspondences and Ibn Taymiyya’s famous *fatwa*. Prof. Amitai’s main argument shows that the Mongol conversion had no influence on the progressive rapprochement and consequent peace agreement between Mamluks and Ilkhanids.

- 5 The fourth and final chapter “Warriors and Society: Two Turco-Mongol Military Elites Relate to Muslim Societies” offers an in-depth and comparative analysis of the complex relation between both rulers and their ruled population and how this influenced their own legitimacy. If as Amitai correctly stresses, both systems were quite different up to the Mongol conversion, they are nevertheless worth being studied in a comparative way. This is particularly relevant when looking at their vast patronage policy towards religious buildings (through *waqf*). The religious aspect of legitimation and the support of the ‘*ulamā*’ is particularly strong within the Mamluk sultanate. In addition to the numerous building projects (both in cities and rural areas), the sultans also devoted much effort into the enforcement of the *ṣarīʿa* (especially the concept of “commanding right and forbidding wrong”), the reform of the judicial system and the revival of the Abbasid caliphate (p. 94). The Mongol case is somewhat more complex, especially when looking at the period preceding their conversion when the Ilkhanids developed no particular efforts towards their (Muslim) subjects. Prof. Amitai goes against the argument posing that the development of pre-Islamic Iranian tradition in the hands of Persian-speaking bureaucrats was a new legitimizing tool towards the Ilkhanids’ subjects. According to him, Mongol ideology prevailed until the time of Mongol conversion, when Islamic legitimacy was added to address and relate to the subject. Only then “one important barrier between them [the Mongols] and the mass of Muslims in Iran and the surrounding countries had been removed” (p. 107). The work ends with an epilogue on “An Informative and Amusing Episode from Mamluk-Ilkhanid Diplomacy” presented as “another piece of evidence for Ilkhanid-Mamluk relations” (p. 109).
- 6 The format and style of the book is pleasant and easy to read. Whereas *Holy War and Rapprochement* is no ground-breaking work on the topic, it is nevertheless a great updated work on Mamluk-Ilkhanid relationship based on Prof. Amitai’s longstanding research and more recent historiography, which is discussed, reviewed and expanded. Furthermore, Amitai also adds a number of new lines of inquiries to be further developed. It is therefore an important addition to the specialist’s library, and an excellent introduction to students.

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